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Targeting epigenetic mechanisms for pain relief.

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Abstract

Epigenetic changes are chemical modifications to chromatin that modulate gene activity without altering the DNA sequence. While research on epigenetics has grown exponentially over the past few years, very few studies have investigated epigenetic mechanisms in relation to pain states. However, epigenetic mechanisms are crucial to memory formation that requires similar synaptic plasticity to pain processing, indicating that they may play a key role in the control of pain states. This article reviews the early evidence suggesting that epigenetic mechanisms are engaged after injury and in chronic pain states, and that drugs used clinically to target the epigenetic machinery for the treatment of cancer might be useful for the management of chronic pain.

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